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Review – Cyril Orji, *A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation*

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***A Semiotic Approach to the Theology of Inculturation.* Cyril Orji. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015. 236 pp. \$29.00. Paper. ISBN: 9781498200745**

In this work, Cyril Orji focuses on the African theology of inculturation. For the sake of its Christian appropriateness, African intelligibility, moral integrity and personal and historical credibility, the theology of inculturation needs to be more than a practice of its process. It needs to come to self-consciousness and become more aware of its epistemological practice. According to the author, a semiotic approach is the methodological tool for this awakening.

Semiotics indicates that the world and humans are a web of signs and, thus, an abode of meaning that fights against various forms of reductionism. Even more, signs are performative; they denote and connote this meaning, making people historical beings in charge of their destiny. Therefore, semiotics informs a cultural anthropology that takes seriously the human subject, his/her consciousness and the history of his/her community as well as the diversity and intercommunication with other cultures and groups. (11)

Considering this tool, the situation of Christianity in Africa requires a theology of inculturation. A theology of inculturation is an approach that strives to integrate African culture into the understanding of the Christian faith and experience. According to Orji, its goal is "the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular local cultural context." (183-184) In order to be relevant, a theology of inculturation needs to integrate and correlate African traditions, values, and history with Christian thought and mission. This integration is a commitment not only to the African worldview, but also to the people who forge it and live within it. In the context of globalization, African people are beset by a horrible poverty, which is material as well as anthropological. Therefore, the theological practice of inculturation is replete with the theology of liberation as epitomized in the Black Theology from South-Africa and the rest of the continent. (20-54)

In subsequent chapters, Orji demonstrates his scholarly competence. The second chapter is devoted to the examination of the "Single Story Narratives," (56-87) the third bears on the "Metapragmatic Use of Language," (88-120) the fourth concerns the "Cultural Turn," (121- 152) and the fifth discusses "New Studies in Semiotics." (153-

184). Here, various theories and scholars are called upon in support of this consciousness and understanding of the theology of inculturation.

In light of the commitment of the discourse, the author can lay down do's and don'ts as well as ten habits related to the theology of inculturation. He delves into the difficulties that need to be overcome under various topics: 'Culture Is a Moving Viewpoint, Unrecoverable Lost Time, Overreliance on Past Successful Methods, Excessive Entanglement of Inculturation with Liturgy, Resistance to Change, The Problem of Syncretism, Cultural Identity and the Complexity of the Nation-State, the Problem of Cultural Romanticism, and Conversion Is a Complex Phenomenon.' (188-93) C. Orji also speaks of semiotic habits that need to be acquired and honed: 'Avoid Classicism, Beware of the Dangers of One Single-Story Narratives, Broaden Your Horizon, Seek Higher Viewpoint, Always Differentiate (Consciousness), Foster Spiritual and Cultural Development, Celebrate Pluralism, Promote Christian Fellowship, Be Creative, and Relish in Self Correcting Process of Learning.' (193-217)

Orji is a distinguished and creative systematic theologian. His philosophical scholarship is called upon and used in support of a semiotic approach to the theology of inculturation. The originality of his writing resides in the integration and correlation of different theories and methods that are emerging from Francophone Africa. Professor Dennis M. Doyle noticed that "few Western scholars can speak both as a Christian believer and as an academic researcher without switching hats in the process. Orji speaks in these two ways seamlessly with one voice as he weaves together into a coherent whole a range of elements that might otherwise seem disparate." (11)

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